

RESEARCH DATA ALLIANCE

DRAFT WORKING GROUP GUIDELINES

OCTOBER, 2012

Global Data Meeting Participants:

Thank you very much for participating in this important meeting and helping us “flesh out” a viable approach to creating and enabling effective Working Groups for the Research Data Alliance. Your willingness to work through these guidelines and to provide constructive feedback on their feasibility is much appreciated. Beyond what is communicated at the meeting, please feel free to provide further feedback to enquiries@rd-alliance.org with the subject “WG Guideline Feedback”. Thanks very much!

The RDA NGS team

GOAL OF RDA WORKING GROUPS

RDA Working Groups should tangibly accelerate progress in concrete ways for specific communities, by increasing innovation, coordinating the global data community across disciplinary boundaries, and promoting data sharing and exchange, interoperability, use and re-use, discoverability analysis, stewardship and preservation, and best practice.

Although Working Group outcomes or “deliverables” will differ, RDA Working Groups should strive for “focused effort, tangible progress”. This can be interpreted as encouraging

- “Harvestable” efforts for which roughly a year of work can eliminate a roadblock for a substantial community focused on innovation
- Efforts that have substantive applicability to “chunks” of the data community, but may not apply to everyone
- Efforts for which working scientists and researchers can start today to get something done now, while more long-term or far-reaching solutions are being appropriately discussed in other venues

In addition to the shorter-term, pragmatic focus of the RDA Working Groups described herein, critical longer-term R&D efforts, supported by Government sponsors, the Private Sector, and others, must continue to be in place to promote innovation and discovery. The Research Data Alliance Working Group process is meant to complement those efforts in the short-term by removing existing roadblocks, and accelerating forward progress for working scientists and researchers.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH DATA ALLIANCE WORKING GROUP?

Membership in RDA Working Groups should be open to everyone. RDA Working Group members are expected to a) commit their time and effort to making the WG successful, and b) intend to carry out the “action plan” of the WG within their home organization / institution / group to the best of their abilities.¹ Each approved RDA WG should include members who can make substantial impact through efforts within their home organization, institution, or group. RDA WG members need not be from a RDA member country or from any particular sector. It is expected that RDA working group constituencies will be international and multi-sector.

WORKING GROUP OUTCOMES

Working group outcomes or “deliverables” should facilitate tangible progress towards innovation for a significant cohort within the international data community. There are many ways to make progress and Working Group outcomes / deliverables may come in a variety of forms including:

- **New data standards² or harmonization of existing standards.** RDA WGs focusing on standards and harmonization should include specific communities who will benefit from this effort and who will adopt the new or harmonized standards, effectively putting them into “action” at the completion of the Working Group.
- **Greater data sharing, exchange, interoperability, usability and re-usability.** RDA WGs focusing on data sharing, exchange, interoperability, usability, and/or re-usability should evolve or create new infrastructure, tools, technologies, services, approaches, policies, or other vehicles that improve upon current practice for a significant cohort. Deliverables for this work should be adopted / put into practice by WG members, at the least.
- **Greater discoverability of research data sets.** RDA WGs focusing on data discoverability should evolve or create new infrastructure, tools, technologies, registries, approaches, policies, or other vehicles that facilitate the discoverability of research data³ beyond current practice for a significant cohort. Deliverables for this work should include adoption of those vehicles.
- **Better management, stewardship, and preservation of research data.** RDA WGs focusing on management, stewardship, and preservation should evolve or create practice, policy, infrastructure, and/or other appropriate vehicles, and facilitate their adoption/implementation within Working Group institutions and organizations and beyond.

¹ The RDA Working Group members are expected to carry out the “action plan” of the Working Group “under normal circumstances” with the understanding that for some members, only limited action may be possible by the time the Working Group completes its work.

² RDA is not a standards organization comparable to ISO for example. It adopts the process of IETF in so far as rough consensus counts.

³ For these purposes, “research data” is broadly defined to be digital data sets generated or used by the research community.

Because of the short life-span for Working Groups (12-18 months), any issues of Intellectual Property, and relevant national or international law, policy, or regulation must be well-understood and addressed up-front by the WG.

WORKING GROUP “CASE STATEMENT”

In order to be approved as an RDA Working Group, candidate Working Groups will be asked to prepare a “case statement” describing the focus, outcomes, and operation of the group. A WG Case Statement should contain the following components:

1. **WG Charter:** A concise articulation of what issues the WG will address within a 12-18 month time frame and what its outcomes or “deliverables” will be
2. **Value Proposition:** A specific description of who will benefit from the adoption / implementation of the WG outcomes / “deliverables” and what tangible impacts the adoption / implementation of the deliverables should have.
3. **Action Plan:** A specific plan for adoption / implementation of the WG deliverables within the organizations and institutions represented by WG members, and plans for adoption / implementation of the deliverables more broadly within the community.
4. **Work Plan:** A specific and detailed description of how the WG will operate including
 - The form and description of final deliverables of the WG
 - The form and description of documents, code or intermediate deliverables that will be developed during the course of the WG’s work
 - The WG’s planned approach to broader community engagement and participation
5. **Initial Membership:** A specific list of initial members of the WG. A description of the initial leadership for the WG.

WORKING GROUP CASE STATEMENT CRITERIA

Case Statements for candidate Working Groups will be reviewed based on the following criteria:

- **IMPACT:** Are the deliverables and the WG Action Plan achievable and do they produce tangible results? In the best case, will the work and deliverable described by the WG Case Statement foster innovation and discovery through data sharing, exchange, and use; data discoverability and analysis; harmonization or creation of standards; development and adoption of policy; stewardship and community best practices; or other mechanisms?
- **TIMEFRAME:** Can the proposed work, outcomes /deliverables, and Action Plan described in the Case Statement be accomplished in 12-18 months?
- **SCOPE / FIT:** Is the scope too large for effective progress, too small for an RDA effort, or not appropriate for the RDA? Overall, is this a worthwhile effort for the RDA to take on?